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1998 Key Issues & Opportunities

Inyo National Forest

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The Inyo National Forest publishes a Schedule of Proposed Environmental Actions on a quarterly basis. The schedule is designed to provide the public and other agencies an early opportunity to become aware of proposals that may affect or interest them. Copies are available upon request.

1998 Key Issues and Opportunities

Inyo National Forest

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Table of Contents

Message from the Forest Supervisor Team i

1998 Key Issues

Program Budget and Organization 1

Rangeland and Vegetation Management 3

Kern Plateau Collaborative Planning 3

Recreation Residence and Resort Permit Reissuance and Recreation Residence Appraisals 4

Mono Basin Restoration 5

Forest Health and Ecosystem Management 6

Fuelwood Program 7

Administrative Efficiencies, Public Service and Partnerships 8

Recreation Fee Pilot Projects 9

Commercial Wilderness Outfitter / Guides and Needs Assessments 10

John Muir and Ansel Adams Wildernesses, DEIS and Draft Management Direction 11

Proposed Sherwin / Snowcreek Ski Area 11

Public Health 12

Mammoth Lakes Development 14

Status Updates on Previous Key Issues

Mt. Whitney 15

Geothermal Leasing and Development 15

Mammoth Lakes Water Development 16

Coalition for Unified Recreation in the Eastern Sierra and the Rural Community Assistance Program 17

Collaborative Planning and Local Government Relations 18

Snowcreek Golf Course Expansion 19

Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive Species 20

Existing and Proposed Hydroelectric Projects 22

Land Exchanges 23

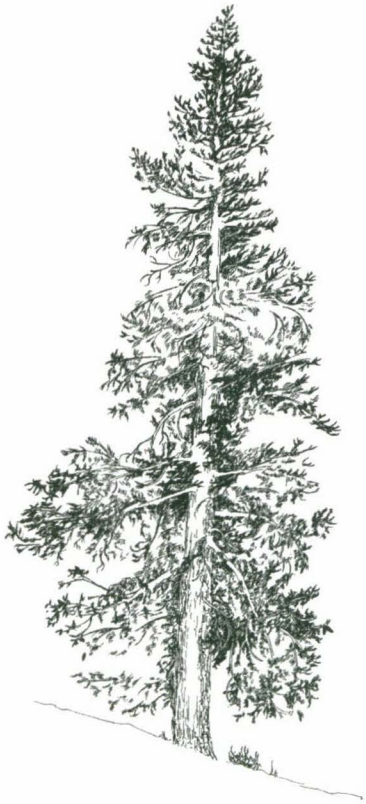
Mammoth / June Ecosystem Management 24

Off-Highway Vehicle Use Strategy 25

Royal Gold Heap Leach Mine Proposal 26

Message from the Forest Supervisor Team

Perhaps the most significant event affecting the Inyo National Forest in 1997 was Dennis Martin's retirement, after more than ten years as Forest Supervisor. Dennis provided the essential leadership during the most difficult decade in the Inyo National Forest's history. This period was marked by the completion of the first Land and Resource Management Plan, development of a draft Wilderness Management Direction for Central Sierra Wildernesses, the creation of the Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area and debate over water and land management issues within the Basin. It was also an era of reduced federal budgets and workforce, a shifting of public desire from commodity to amenity forest values and products, and a seemingly endless wave of projects requested by and essential to users, communities, and cooperating agencies in the Eastern Sierra.



Dennis was instrumental in helping the Forest and communities begin to move "outside of the box" and search for new and better ways to involve employees and forest stakeholders in the management of the Inyo. He was effectively applying collaborative principles, both internally and externally, before it became popular within the Forest Service. He possessed a unique ability for being able to look ahead into the future to see and understand the changes needed in order to remain efficient and effective as an organization. Our reorganization, implemented three years ago, is a good example of such an anticipated change that was needed. Today, we can look back and thank Dennis for his foresight and commitment to instituting the many difficult and controversial decisions that have shaped our current organization and this Forest's future. Our focus on communities and visitors, stable workforce in balance with projected budgets, and use of collaborative processes are all current Inyo attributes we credit to Dennis.

Along with the changes in priorities and leadership, 1997 proved to be a productive year for the Inyo National Forest. Significant accomplishments included:

- Recreation Fee Demo project at the Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area Visitor Center and South Tufa Interpretive Site, and co-location of visitor services formerly provided at Lee Vining Ranger Station at the Visitor Center.
- Draft Wilderness Direction for John Muir, Ansel Adams, Dinkey Lakes and Monarch Wildernesses.
- Final decision approving the Snowcreek Golf Course.
- Development of a planning and public participation strategy for the general area of the upper South Fork Kern River (Kern Plateau), including a draft conservation strategy for the Volcano Creek Golden Trout.
- Application of prescribed fire as a management tool to recycle nutrients, reduce fuel loadings, improve wildlife habitat, and return fire to the ecosystem.
- Full implementation of the Inyo's new organization, including the filling of key positions.
- Establishment of the "Inyo Web Site" on the Internet to provide public information on a variety of Forest topics.
- Continued progress with Mono County and other agencies in establishing and operating a County Collaborative Planning Team, including the establishment of a wetlands technical advisory committee.
- Response to flood damage with minimal inconvenience to forest users.

This list contains only a few highlights of accomplishments for 1997. The total list consists of well over 100 specific projects and work activities.

Looking forward to 1998, the Forest will gain Jeff Bailey as the new Forest Supervisor. Jeff comes to the Inyo with a strong back-

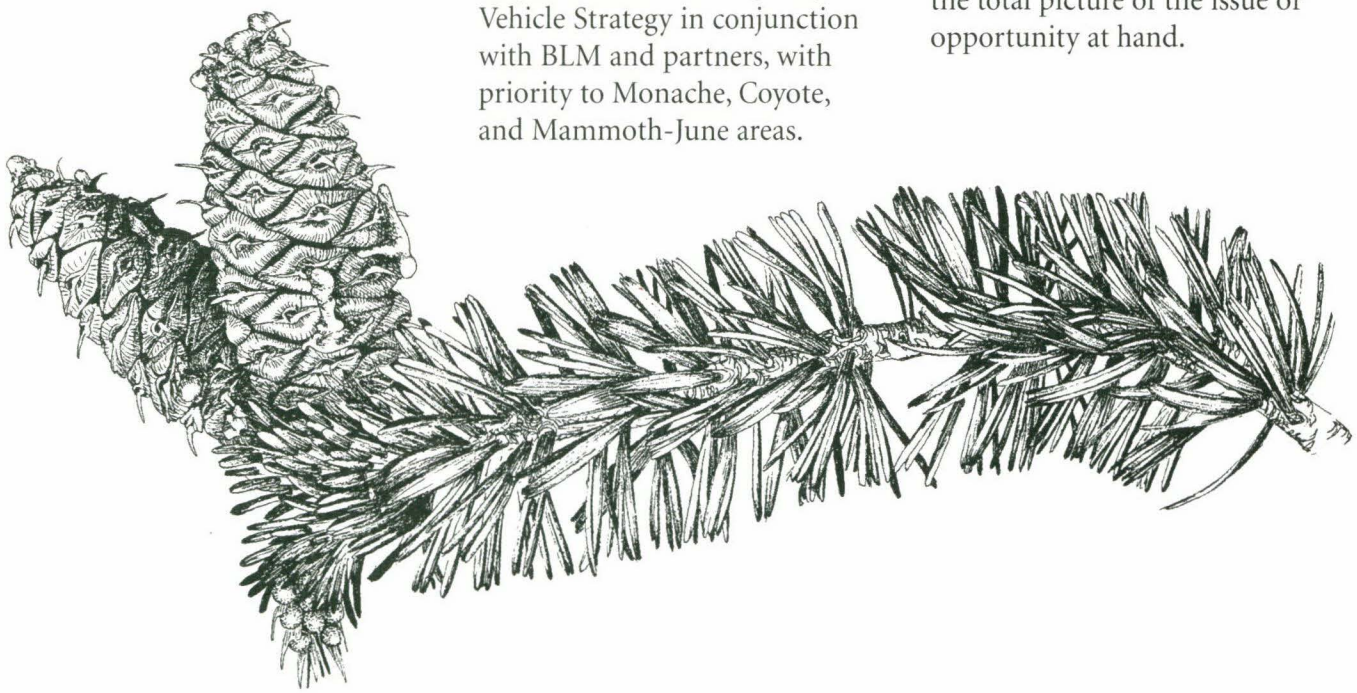
ground in recreation, wilderness management, winter sports administration, lands and special uses, and outfitter/guide and horse packer permit administration at both the local and national levels.

It is likely that the current trend of unexpected crises common in these uncertain times will continue to influence our work priorities and future accomplishments. Nonetheless, noteworthy priorities for 1998 include:

- Reissue expiring resort, concessionaire, and pack station permits.
- Continue the feasibility study for consolidating visitor contact services and facilities in Bishop and Lone Pine, including the Wilderness Permit Reservation System.
- Add Schulman Grove Interpretive Site in the Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest to the current Recreation Fee Demo project.
- Continue the public review process for the Draft Management Direction for the John Muir, Ansel Adams, Dinkey Lakes and Monarch Wildernesses.
- Award and administer the contract to implement the Eastern Sierra Scenic Byway project on behalf of the Coalition for Unified Recreation in the Eastern Sierra (CURES).
- Implement a combined Bureau of Land Management (BLM)/ Forest Service effort to jointly manage and operate respective fire organizations and contract to co-locate agency offices.
- Support Mono County Collaborative Planning Team's wetlands and urban interface planning projects.
- Continue with the Kern Plateau Strategy to address public and resource issues, including finalizing the Golden Trout Conservation Strategy.
- Implement the Off-Highway Vehicle Strategy in conjunction with BLM and partners, with priority to Monache, Coyote, and Mammoth-June areas.
- Develop and implement a Fuelwood Strategy that integrates the needs of communities and fuelwood gatherers with forest health, wildlife and soil objectives.
- Complete NEPA analyses on three grazing allotments per the Rescissions Act 15 year schedule.
- Respond to needs for the preparation of the Snowcreek Ski Area Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement.

In many respects, 1998 has the all the markings and promises of a new era on the Inyo National Forest. New leadership will be well positioned to build upon past investments that have contributed to creating a relatively healthy Forest.

Once again this year, the Bishop Resource Area of the Bureau of Land Management was invited to contribute to this document in places where we felt that information from the BLM would help the public to better understand the total picture of the issue or opportunity at hand.



Program Budget and Organization

Both organizational change and program budget continue to be key issues as they have been for some time on the Inyo National Forest. The Forest has now operated for over three years under the new organizational concept that includes forest-wide teams with much broader supervisory spans of control and without ranger districts. The results in respect to program accomplishment, service to the public, and resource stewardship have been generally positive. As a result of budget constraints, not organizational change, the Forest has lost over 50 permanently appointed positions during this same period of time. The loss of needed skills is presenting difficulties in meeting both quality and quantity of expectations.

One of the basic principles of the new organization is to continually apply the concepts of adaptive management. As opportunities are presented or problems identified, appropriate changes are made. Between December 1997 and February 1998, the Forest, as part of a Region-wide budget and workforce assessment, conducted our first analysis of the effectiveness of our current organization and workforce in light of future projected budgets. One critical evaluation criteria of the Regional assessment was the percentage of a Forest's budget that was considered to be of a fixed cost nature, mainly associated with permanent employee costs. The Inyo National Forest's fixed cost percentage was the lowest of the 18 National Forests in Region 5 (Pacific Southwest Region). This could not have happened without our previous downsizing and reorganizing work. The forest used this opportunity to consider changes in skills needed or not needed and to fine-tune the existing organization. Other significant changes were not deemed necessary or appropriate at this point in time.

Overall, the Forest did an excellent job of managing the program budget during the last fiscal year. Performance in meeting Congressional intent, charge-as-worked direction, and maintaining budget integrity was of the best in the Pacific Southwest Region. Fiscal accountability remains one of the Region's top priorities for 1998.

Based on the final budget information for Fiscal Year (FY) 1998, it appears that the overall Forest allocation in appropriated funds will be about five percent less than Fiscal Year 1997. A few areas such as wildlife, threatened and endangered species, and soil/water/air experienced increases while other programs such as ecosystem management and general administration continued to decrease significantly. For purposes of comparison, the figures for FY'97 are compared to the allocations in FY'98 for some of the major programs on the Forest.

Program	FY'97	FY'98	Percent Change
Ecosystem Management	268	189	-29.5%
Recreation	2,389	2,371	-1%
Wilderness	662	615	-7%
Heritage	102	123	+21%
Wildlife	151	205	+36%
TE Hab Mgt.	56	141	+152%
Grazing	120	114	-5%
Watershed	115	133	+16%
Soil/Air	103	119	+12%
Minerals	129	145	+12%
Real Estate	198	177	-11%
Timber	198	196	-1%
Road Mtnc.	582	507	-13%
General Adm.	1,078	743	-34%
Fire	2,038	2,324	+14%

**Figures in thousands of dollars.*

Based on the combined capability of the organization and the program budget for FY'98, the following goals have been established:

1. Increase private sector involvement to provide and administer safe, well maintained, and efficiently operated camp grounds, resorts, and other developed sites.
2. Emphasize strengthening and pursuing partner relationships, privatization, and elimination of duplicated services.
3. Administer wilderness areas and the Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area in a manner consistent with legislative and regulatory requirements.

4. Continue to assist with the sustainability of communities through participation in the Coalition for Unified Recreation in the Eastern Sierra (CURES) and the development and implementation of rural development initiatives.
5. Support and participate in collaborative efforts with counties and other federal, state and local agencies to emphasize landscape planning.
6. Strengthen and sustain strong government to government relationships with those Native American tribes that have an interest or affiliation with the Inyo National Forest.
7. Initiate work on critical heritage program emphasis areas.
8. Emphasize administration of existing lands and special use permits, and completion of existing initiatives, projects and permits. Acceptance of new annual and term permit applications will be strongly discouraged.
9. Work collaboratively with the BLM on issues and initiatives that mutually benefit each organization's mission and objectives.
10. Accomplishment of functional program work focused and based within an overall integrated landscape analysis as a means of most effectively utilizing available funds, and to maximize those efforts needed to make ecosystem based decisions.
11. Maintain a logical and manageageable schedule of environmental analysis and grazing permit reissuance, per the provisions of the Rescissions Act.
12. Maintain a fully integrated Forest and interagency fire organization, jointly managed by an Interagency (FS/BLM) Fire Management Officer.
13. With the approved Forest staffing plan fully implemented, build on the concept of a learning organization and incorporate adaptive management as a normal way of doing business.
14. Work closely with the Forest Law Enforcement Staff in strengthening positive and effective relations with local non-federal law enforcement organizations.
15. Place special emphasis on proper implementation of the Forest unified budget process ensuring consistency with Congressional intent and national and regional financial direction and guidelines.
16. Within budget capabilities, develop and retain a diverse workforce that is supported and rewarded for successful accomplishment of the overall Forest mission.
17. Health and safety of Forest visitors and employees will be given highest priority in determining the use of forest resources and completing planned work.
18. Work specifically funded by Regional budget direction or assigned targets is supported and accomplished. This work will be fully integrated with other priority work.

For each of the goals, specific objectives have been developed that will ensure accomplishment of priority work. As the year proceeds, work priorities may change, however these goals will drive whatever changes might be made over time.

Rangeland and Vegetation Management

Overview and Present Status

Implementation of previous decisions and associated monitoring for effectiveness is a priority for the Inyo National Forest in 1998. Permits will be reissued in compliance with PL 104-19 (the Rescissions Act of 1995) and the Inyo National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, as they expire or if they are waived as part of a business transaction.

The Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power worked together in 1997 to find a solution to a grazing management issue at Fish Slough. This effort was coordinated through the Fish Slough Area of Critical Environmental Concern planning and implementation process. These cooperative efforts will continue on through 1998. Several Environmental Assessments will be completed for grazing allotments in Fiscal Year 1998 and the associated permits will be issued with connected actions identified during the analysis process. The ongoing ecosystem analysis process on the Kern Plateau will provide a forum for participation and analysis for the grazing allotments located in the upper South Fork Kern Watershed.

Also this year, the Inyo National staff will be working with state, county and private agencies and individuals to continue noxious weed eradication and to develop a collaborative noxious weed inventory and eradication program.

The goal of the Forest throughout 1998 will be to make range resource management decisions based on sound ecological, economic and social parameters and to set a standard of excellence in implementing integrated vegetation management. This will be accomplished by integrating the range vegetation management program with watershed and ecosystem analysis projects whenever possible. Opportunities for participation by the public and other agencies will include written requests in association with the Environmental Assessment process, written requests as well as public workshops in association with the ecosystem analysis process, and volunteer efforts for monitoring and watershed restoration.

Kern Plateau Collaborative Planning

Overview

The Kern Plateau is located at the southern end of the Sierra Nevada range and encompasses the south and north forks of the Kern River. Distinctively different than the Sierra crest to the north, the Plateau is a relatively gentle area of conifer forests and large meadows, punctuated with evidence of volcanic activity. The majority of this area is administered as the Golden Trout Wilderness, but also includes the Monache Meadows area, outside the wilderness boundaries. It is bordered by the Owens Valley and the South Sierra Wilderness to the east, the John Muir Wilderness and Sequoia National Park to the north, and the Sequoia National Forest to the west and south.

Present Status

Public interest in the general area of the upper South Fork Kern River is very high. Ranchers, recreationists and members of the environmental community are focusing attention here, voicing their concerns about the condition of the resources, uses, and management practices.

In 1996, California Trout formed a working group to identify actions to restore the fisheries habitat. The leadership for this effort transitioned to the Inyo National Forest in early 1997. In response to changing demands and pressures, the Inyo has developed a revised planning and public participation strategy, based on a community of interest approach.

The cornerstone of this strategy is implementation of an ecosystem analysis of the Kern Plateau. Its purpose is to review previous work and identify actions, projects and management practices that will help move resource conditions

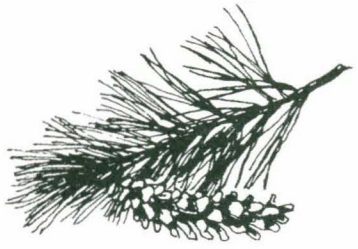
toward the desired condition as defined in the Inyo NF Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP).

Several opportunities for public input and participation are integrated into this strategy. These include sharing information or data, reviewing and commenting on existing information, and help in identifying opportunities and future actions. The framework for this will be public meetings, workshops and field trips. These informal forums allow for open discussion focused on finding common ground and proposing actions to move toward the desired condition.

In 1998, forest resource specialists and members of the public will begin identifying gaps of information critical for defining ecosystem parameters. These gaps can be considered opportunities for future project proposals. In some cases, opportunities will be identified for specific projects that may be carried forward into National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis and implementation. Public involvement will occur throughout the process, resulting in proposed future actions on the Kern Plateau.

This ecosystem analysis parallels other resource management on the Kern Plateau. Some of these efforts include the Volcano Creek Golden Trout Conservation Strategy; the Dutch John Fish Barrier analysis; ongoing Ecological Unit Inventory work; implementation of LRMP Allowable Grazing Vegetation Utilization Standards; and general resource management surveys and projects.

For an expanded overview of the Kern Plateau Project, visit its website at: www.r5.fs.fed.us/inyo/kern.



Recreation Residence and Resort Permit Reissuance and Recreational Residence Appraisals

Overview and Present Status

There are 350 recreation residences currently located on the Inyo National Forest. These cabins are authorized under the terms of "special use permits" administered by the Forest Service. In 1988, the Forest Service adopted national policy pertaining to future management of recreation residences. That policy was appealed to the Secretary of Agriculture by persons who felt the new policy was biased in favor of the permittee. In 1989, the Forest Service was directed to revise certain provisions of the policy that focused on the procedures for renewing permits. In 1991, proposed changes were published in the Federal Register and comments invited. These were taken into account when the final policy was published in June, 1994.

The final policy states that continued use of the residences must be based on Forest Plan direction. It requires that the allocation of land for recreation residences must be specifically addressed in the Forest Plan when it is amended or revised. If the use is consistent with the Forest Plan, it will continue. In most cases, renewal or non-renewal decisions must be based on an appropriate environmental analysis. The question of permit renewal, which occurs when the permit terminates, is now based on consistency with Forest Plan management direction.

Most recreation residence permits on the Forest have a stated term of 20 years. As these permits expire, the decision to issue new permits will be based on Forest Plan consistency. The policy will first be implemented for the Lower Rock Creek Tract. The permits in this tract expired in 1990 and were extended on a year-to-year basis, pending the final policy published in 1994. An Environmental Assessment was initiated, with a final decision being published on October 17, 1997. The decision was made to accept the "joint use" alternative, which retained the Lower Rock Creek Recreation Residence Tract, and also expanded the day use area at the entrance to Tuff Campground.

In 1997, appraisals for recreation residences were conducted. This process occurs every 20 years to redetermine base rates for annual fees. These appraisals utilize fair market values. Recreation residence permit holders were involved during this process. All of the final appraisal amounts have been determined, except for the

recreation residence tracts on the south end of the Forest. Those appraisal amounts will be available in the spring of 1998.

There are 31 resorts on the Inyo National Forest which are also authorized and administered under special use permits. The length of their terms varies. As they come up for renewal or are sold, they are also reviewed for consistency with the Forest Plan. If there are any proposed changes to the permit or permit area, an appropriate level of environmental analysis is done. Resorts applying for new permits or extensions are prioritized for evaluation as they occur.

Currently, Tamarack Lodge and Mammoth Lakes Pack Outfit are in the process of selling their improvements. The Forest is in the analysis process for issuing new permits to the prospective buyers. During 1998, the Forest will also analyze the reissuance of the permits for the YMCA of Los Angeles and San Gabriel Boys Club Organizational Camps. Their permits expire December 31, 1998.

In 1999, five resort permits which also authorize Outfitting/Guiding in wilderness will expire. The analysis for permit reissuance will begin in late summer, 1998. Since authorizing a new 20 year term permit will happen before any scheduled comprehensive "needs assessment" of outfitter/guide operations, a permit clause will be added to the new permit which allows the Forest Service to change the authorized operating conditions as the result of any future land or resource management or "needs assessment" decisions. The standards and guidelines which a future "needs assessment" must meet will be established for the John Muir and Ansel Adams Wildernesses, through the Central Sierra Wilderness Planning process. A draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was released on December 1, 1998. Until that direction is finalized in a Final EIS, "needs assessments" will not be done for commercial uses operating in these areas.

Mono Basin Restoration

Overview

Forest Service involvement in the resolution of the Mono Lake controversy stems from the Congressional designation of the Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area in 1984, which rendered the Forest Service a riparian landowner. The draft Scenic Area Environmental Impact Study (EIS) and Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP), released in 1988, identified a range of lake levels (6377 to 6390 feet), which would best protect the values of the Scenic Area.

In 1989, the 3rd District Court of Appeals ordered that the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) water licenses be modified to require flows below their diversion points. This was to bring them into compliance with state Fish and Game codes that protect fisheries. In 1990, the Final Scenic Area EIS and CMP were released, with a preferred range of lake level being from 6377 to 6390.

In the spring of 1993, the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) released a Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) addressing Mono Lake, its tributary streams, and affected downstream areas. Evidentiary hearings were held from October 1993 to February 1994, with 15 parties participating, including the Forest Service.

After review of the Mono Basin EIR, and in light of the fact that the Environmental Protection Agency classified the Mono Lake Basin as a non-attainment area in respect to PM-10 emissions (size and amount of dust particles in the air), and since there is no proven or feasible method of physically mitigating the relicted lands to reduce dust storms, the

Forest Service took the position of asking the State Water Resources Control Board to adopt the 6390 alternative as analyzed in the EIR.

On September 28, 1994—ten years to the day that Congress designated the Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area—the State Water Resources Control Board voted unanimously to raise the level of Mono Lake to 6392, and to restore its tributary streams and some wetlands.

Present Status

In 1995, the LADWP was required to prepare and submit a plan for future stream and waterfowl habitat restoration. A final version was released on December 1, 1995.

Early in 1996 the Forest Service, along with numerous other parties, made formal comments to the proposed restoration plans. A hearing was originally scheduled by the State Water Resources Control Board for November of 1996, but was postponed until late January of 1997 in an attempt to allow the parties to negotiate a settlement to the various concerns regarding both the stream plan and waterfowl plan. The negotiations were completed during the spring of 1997 and a "Settlement Agreement" presented to the SWRCB in June of 1997. The board will likely rule on the agreement to the restoration plans sometime in Spring of 1998.

An issue of high concern to the Forest Service and to the local public is the return of water to Mill Creek for the purpose of restoring waterfowl habitat at the mouth of the creek. In the case of Mill Creek, the Inyo National Forest's interest in the issue of returning water to Mill Creek is heightened due to the fact that the Forest Service has a water right of 12.6 CFS from Mill Creek. Historically, this water has been diverted via Wilson Creek to DeChambeau Ranch for the purposes of maintaining ponds which are of benefit to waterfowl and other wildlife. Portions of Wilson Creek which are on BLM land also support a fishery and a diverse riparian community. Changes in the historical use of Mill Creek water could possibly adversely affect these resource values. Since 1993, the Inyo National Forest in partnership with Ducks Unlimited, Caltrans, and the Mono Lake Committee has been in the process of trying to restore and enhance the DeChambeau ponds. Part of this effort has included an attempt to make the ponds independent of Mill Creek and Wilson Creek water by using hot artesian well water. Independence of Mill Creek and Wilson Creek is especially important during years of below normal precipitation. The success of this at DeChambeau Ponds was demonstrated during the summer of 1997.

The Forest strongly supports a complete analysis of the past and potential uses of Mill Creek water prior to any decisions on its use.

Forest Health and Ecosystem Management

Overview

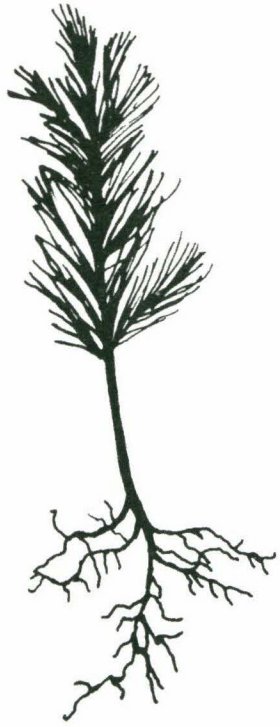
During the past decade, the Inyo and many other National Forests in California have experienced significant changes to their forested landscapes. These changes are in part the result of a seven year drought, but of more significance is the dramatic impact caused by fire suppression over the last 90 years. While the conifer mortality between the communities of Mammoth Lakes and June Lake (on both the east and west sides of Highway 395) has subsided, the conditions that created the problem still persist, including long-term fire suppression that has led to high density stands and heavy fuel loads. The hazardous fire situation will only increase as dead trees from the recent drought fall to the ground.

Fire reacts differently in dense or overstocked stands. With the absence of fire, fuels accumulate on the forest floor. The thick understory of trees and shrubs that has become established is easily ignited in a fire. This layer of vegetation is often called "the ladder fuels" as it provides a continuous fuel source for the fire to move from the forest floor up into the crowns of the larger trees. Once up into the forest canopy, the fire can easily jump from tree to tree and can result in very large devastating wildfires.

Another important change is the size of fires. For the most part, historic fires would burn for days or months and only be put out by weather or the absence of fuels. Because of the vast number of fires in any 10-20 year period, most often a fire would start and burn until it reached the edge of a recent fire where it was unable to continue because the fuels had previously

been consumed by an earlier fire. In this quilt-like patchwork of fires woven across the landscape, the size of the average fire was much larger than under today's scenario where most fires are under one acre in size. Historically, multi-drainage fires were extremely rare because there was not enough unburned areas to support them. Due to the past 90 years of fire suppression, this is no longer the case.

With the exception of a few areas, the entire forest is susceptible to large devastating wildfires. However, this situation can be changed. Through forest management practices such as selective timber harvest, understory thinnings, firewood gathering, and slashing, the overstocked stands can be reduced and the ladder fuels removed. Once this occurs, low intensity prescribed fire can be utilized as a tool to maintain healthy forests.



Thinning of forested stands continued in 1997 and several very successful prescribed fires were accomplished. The Inyo National Forest is continuing to work on numerous projects which will re-establish the role of fire in the forested landscape and help maintain ecologically balanced ecosystems.

Present Status

To promote ecosystem management through thinnings and an aggressive prescribed burning program, in 1998 the Forest will continue the implementation of the Pilot, Crestview, Aqueduct, Smoke and Lookout Ecosystem Management Program; complete thinning of the Railroad and Bishop timber sales; begin thinning Aqueduct compartment; implement a fuelbreak adjacent to the town of Mammoth Lakes; complete NEPA work and begin implementation on Swall Meadows pinyon fuel reduction and defensible space project; and begin implementation of the desired condition for the Mammoth to June Ecosystem Management Project.

In addition, implementation of prescribed fire for hazard fuel reduction, range improvement and wildlife habitat enhancement will continue in 1998.

Following is a list of these projects:

	Acres Planned
Oak Creek/Grays Meadow	20
Indiana Summit	50
Comet	360
(160 acres accomplished)	
Casa Diablo	500
Rust	350
(50 acres accomplished)	
Inyo Craters	5
Sawmill Ridge	50

Total Planned Prescribed Fire Target for FY 98 = 1,785 Acres

Fuelwood Program

Overview and Present Status

The Inyo National Forest has been the primary source of firewood for local residents of the Eastern Sierra from Conway Summit to Lone Pine. By making available logging and thinning slash, the Forest has annually provided 5,000 to 7,000 cords of firewood (2.5 to 3.5 million board feet) for local consumption. The Bishop Bureau of Land Management office began selling fuelwood tags for the Tonopah BLM office this past year. This was done to improve service to the public, as previously tags were received through the mail from Tonopah. With the shift from harvesting old growth timber to commercial thinnings, and since precommercial thinnings have been virtually completed, the traditional sources for firewood will be unavailable in the near future.

In 1997, the Inyo embarked on a program to foster a partnership between the Forest Service and the public to achieve the long-term goal of providing a continuous flow of fuelwood for public consumption, while maintaining ecosystem sustainability. In addition to a media field trip, several news-

paper stories and radio spots, the Forest held three public meetings to present the issues and work collaboratively towards solutions.

The main concerns generated at these meetings were: the continued availability of blown down trees for fuelwood while also maintaining enough downed logs to meet the Land and Resource Management Plan and CalOwl standards for wildlife and soils; the possibility of fuelwood only being available in thinning areas; the lack of law enforcement and public contacts in the field; and the cost of permits. In 1998, these concerns have been mitigated by implementing a 30 inch diameter limit for downed logs and by public understanding of the fact that the cost of the permits would have to increase to sustain the fuelwood program.

One-hundred percent of the money collected from the fuelwood program is directly returned to the Forest for continued implementation of the program.

The Forest has incorporated the results of the public meetings into a modified fuelwood map and an addendum to personal fuelwood permits which explains the importance of snags and logs to wildlife habitat. Ongoing presentations will be made to community groups and input will be solicited from fuelwood gatherers to assess the success of the new strategy. The area south of Smokey Bear Flat will be analyzed for the potential of opening it up to fuelwood gathering.

Administrative Efficiencies, Public Service and Partnerships

Overview and Present Status

With public programs and services costing taxpayers more than they can afford or are willing to pay for, the Inyo National Forest and the BLM Bishop Resource Area, along with most other governmental agencies, are struggling with how to continue to offer existing public programs and meet public expectations with significantly reduced operating budgets. Increasing program and service efficiencies and dealing with public expectations for programs and services are two important areas that the Inyo and the BLM continue to concentrate on in order to close this gap. The following sections describe some of the actions that have been taken or are currently being analyzed or implemented.

Inyo and Administrative Service Reorganizations - Actions taken to reorganize the Inyo and to share administrative services with three other National Forests (Tahoe, Eldorado, and Lake Tahoe Basin) were fundamental moves to increase long-term organizational efficiencies. Ranger Districts and Forests could no longer afford the level of management, technical, or administrative support that had evolved over the past thirty years. Basic organization/management models had to be drastically changed before significant efficiencies could be realized. Eliminating District Rangers (and the Ranger District concept) as well as other staff and middle-managers, forming implementation-oriented teams with forest-wide responsibilities, increasing supervision ratios from 1:3 to 1:10-15, and re-engineering procedures and processes were essential steps taken to create a new, learning organization.

Inyo Program Planning and Budgeting - In the Inyo reorganization, work is planned and budgeted on a forest basis rather than four Ranger Districts. This allows for more efficient and effective planning and budgeting processes and resources are better used to address Forest priorities. It has also improved our ability to plan and develop integrated projects and utilize various benefitting functional funding for common work.

BLM-Forest Service Office Co-location - Increased utilization of common office space and workplace facilities and resources between the BLM and the Forest Service can be realized if our agencies share office facilities in Bishop. A small group of BLM and Forest Service employees has been exploring options for co-location. They have identified opportunities for reducing each agencies' leased office space through co-location as well as other possible sharing of facilities and resources by better cooperation and integration of our work.

Operation of Public Facilities by the Private Sector - Over 100 developed recreation sites (including campgrounds, picnic areas, trailheads, interpretive sites, and

boat launch sites) on the Inyo are currently operated and maintained by private concessionaires. Without concessionaire partners, these services and facilities would not be available to the public, as funding levels are insufficient for the Forest to continue to operate and maintain them. In order to meet the public demand for new or expanded facilities and services, the Forest realizes the private sector will play a more active role in financing and developing recreation facilities in the future.

Fees for Use of Recreation Facilities and Services - Congress has given the Forest Service temporary authorization to experiment with charging fees for recreation facilities and services, beyond traditional authorities (mainly campgrounds.) Entrance fees are being charged at the Mono Basin Scenic Area Visitor Center for viewing interpretive exhibits, the film, and the art gallery, and for entering the South Tufa Recreation Area. Approximately 80 percent of the fees collected are available for funding operation, maintenance and enhancement costs at these sites.

As this document goes to print the Forest is still analyzing the feasibility of charging fees, beginning this year, at the Schulman Grove Interpretive Site in the Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest. Also under consideration is the conversion of some Forest Service operated campgrounds such as Horseshoe Meadows Equestrian Camp, Golden Trout walk-in camp and Grandview Campground, to the Fee Demonstration Program.

Beginning in 1996, the Inyo issued a contract to a private company for managing the Forest Wilderness Reservation System. By authorizing a contractor to take reservations and issue wilderness permits (approximately 20,000 annually) this Forest Service workload was reduced by approximately two thirds, while retaining an essential wilderness management tool.

At this time, the BLM's Resource Advisory Council (RAC) is reviewing the recreation fee issue. The Bishop Resource Area has no plans to institute any fees until the guidelines developed by the RAC are completed. Currently, the four campgrounds administered by the BLM have a voluntary donation program. The BLM is considering installing donation boxes at several trailheads and popular recreation areas.

Consolidation of Visitor Service Facilities - In an effort to continue to offer visitor information and agency contact facilities while reducing associated costs, the Inyo has prioritized and scheduled reviews of all visitor centers (including community chambers of commerce and visitors bureaus) and ranger stations operating within the same general vicinity for possible consolidation of services. The first consolidation occurred in 1996 with the Town of Mammoth Lakes Visitors Bureau combining with the Forest Service Mammoth Visitor Center. In 1997, the Lee Vining Ranger Station visitor services relocated to the Mono Basin Scenic Area Visitor Center. Other consolidations will be considered in Bishop (Forest Service White Mtn. Ranger Station, Bishop BLM Resource Area and Bishop Chamber of Commerce visitor information services) and in Lone Pine (Mt. Whitney Ranger Station and Interagency Visitor Center) during 1998.

Recreation Fee Pilot Projects

Overview

Recent Recreation Fee legislation gave several federal agencies the authority to test the charging of recreation user fees, with 80% of the money kept at the site where it was collected. The money collected can be used for operation, maintenance and enhancement projects.

The Inyo National Forest selected the Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area to be a part of the 200 sites selected nationally for the initial demonstration. Fee collection began in April of 1997 at South Tufa and the Mono Basin Scenic Area Visitor Center. The two dollar per person fee was valid for both areas and could be used over a seven day period. Golden Eagle, Golden Age, and Golden Access passes were honored. Over $90,000 has been collected since April 1, 1997. This funding has provided daily presence of Forest Service staff at the South Tufa site, allowing the Forest to provide increased visitor services, as well as providing needed resource protection. The fees were also used to provide longer operating hours at the Visitor Center, as well as

additional interpretive programs.

Present Status

Congress authorized the Forest Service to add sites to the fee demonstration project, and the Inyo is proposing to add an additional fee collection area under this authorization. The Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest in the White Mountains may be one new fee area, with fee collections being made at the Schulman Grove Interpretive Site. Fees would be used to extend the operating season of this popular site, as well as maintaining the Visitor Center and other improvements. The Forest may also be converting some Forest Service operated campgrounds to the Fee Demonstration program. Under this proposal, the existing fees charged at Horseshoe Meadows Equestrian Camp and Golden Trout walk-in would be retained on-site for the operation and maintenance of the campground. In addition, a minimal fee is being considered for Grandview Campground. Final decisions on these new proposed fee sites will be made in the spring of 1998.

Commercial Wilderness Outfitter / Guides and Needs Assessments

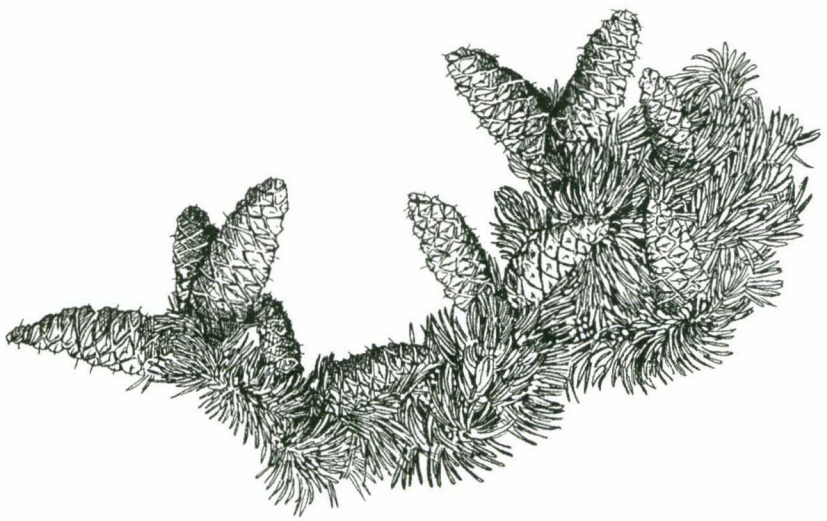
Overview

Approximately five to ten percent of the annual wilderness recreation on the Inyo National Forest is supported by commercial Outfitter/Guides (O/G), mainly pack stock or mountaineering services. These O/Gs provide a valuable public service, assisting the Forest Service with achieving its mission of offering wilderness recreation opportunities in a safe and responsible manner. Special Use Permits are required for all commercial O/Gs.

While commercial O/G services in wilderness are generally supported at current levels by other wilderness users, a segment of visitors has become increasingly concerned and vocal about commercial operators in wilderness. Wilderness managers and permit administrators have been working with O/Gs to minimize their impacts on trails and the wilderness environment. The emphasis has been on implementation and education of the commercial permittees in the Leave No Trace philosophy and techniques.

Present Status

This year, ad hoc committees comprised of Forest Service and Pack Station representatives have joined together to mutually resolve several concerns. These concerns include early season melting of snow on trails via sanding and proper food storage in the wilderness.



Public need for outfitted services will be assessed when permits are up for renewal, and/or when a change in management direction necessitates a change in allocations. This assessment will be initiated on the Inyo National Forest in 1999 when five pack station resort permits come up for renewal. Also at that time, the release of the final John Muir, Ansel Adams, Dinkey Lakes and Monarch Wilderness Plan will describe the desired conditions for these wildernesses. When the needs assessment is completed, it will guide management decisions on types and amounts of recreational uses allocated to the commercial and non-commercial public.

The role commercial O/Gs play in the wilderness recreation service delivery system is as important as ever. However, public and agency expectations for commercial O/Gs have changed. O/Gs operating in wilderness are expected to continue to serve visitors while reducing their impacts on the wilderness environment. The Forest Service and O/Gs will continue to work together to clarify expectations and acceptable standards of performance.

John Muir and Ansel Adams Wildernesses, DEIS and Draft Management Direction

Overview

The John Muir and Ansel Adams Wilderness Management Plans were first approved in 1978. New issues have surfaced since the wilderness management plans were signed and these needed to be analyzed and new direction provided. The Inyo National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, approved in 1988, and the Sierra National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, approved in 1992, provided direction to revise or update these plans. The 1984 additions to the Ansel Adams Wilderness needed to be included in this update. In addition to the revision of these plans, management direction needed to be provided for the Dinkey Lakes and Monarch Wildernesses. Dinkey Lakes Wilderness is managed by the Sierra National Forest and Monarch Wilderness by the Sierra and Sequoia National Forests. The decision was made to address these four contiguous wildernesses in one planning process and one document. This approach to wilderness planning provides comprehensive and consistent wilderness direction for central Sierra wilderness areas.

The Inyo, Sequoia, and Sierra National Forests have worked together jointly revising the John Muir and Ansel Adams Wilderness Plans and providing direction for the Monarch and Dinkey Lakes Wildernesses. An Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) undertook the environmental analysis to recommend revisions to the plans and new direction, utilizing the Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) planning process. The process includes identification of issues, preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) analyzing alternate methods of resolving the issues, and recommendation for management direction. The IDT held a series of public meetings over a two year period which concluded in February of 1995. Many interest groups and individuals were represented at these meetings providing ideas and opinions to decision makers on how to deal with wilderness issues and protect the wilderness resource.

Present Status

The Draft EIS was released on December 1, 1997 for review and comment. Several public meetings and presentations were held to help explain the plan. Many concerned citizens and local government agencies expressed an interest in having an expanded comment period so that the proposed direction could be reviewed in the field. Based on those requests, the comment period was extended from March 6, 1998 until November 1, 1998.

The Forest Service will continue to work with the public during the comment period to explain how the proposed direction will be implemented. After the comment period closes, Forest Service staff will analyze the comments and prepare the agency response. The response to comments should be completed in early 1999.

Proposed Sherwin / Snowcreek Ski Area

Overview

The proposed Snowcreek Ski Area is located adjacent to the community of Mammoth Lakes with the base area on private land. Snowcreek Ski Area was originally designated by the Chief of the Forest Service in 1967 as a winter-sports site. This designation was reaffirmed during the late 1970s through a winter sports planning effort by the Forest Service and the public, which identified various potential ski areas on the Inyo National Forest. The area was designated as "Alpine Ski Area, Existing and Under Study" in the 1988 Inyo National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. Numerous studies in conjunction with this designation have been conducted on the Snowcreek Area since the 1960s.

Present Status

On October 13, 1992 a permit was issued to Dempsey Construction Corporation to complete a Master Development plan on the Snowcreek Ski Area. The Draft Master Development Plan was released in November 1993. Public scoping for issues associated with the proposal was completed in January of 1994. Key issues identified by government agencies and the public include the potential impacts on deer, air quality, and

water resources. Alternatives to the proposed master plan will be developed to address these issues. These alternatives will be presented in a Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement along with updated resource information. A Final Supplement will be released after a review of agency and public comments on the Draft. The decision to be made in the Supplemental EIS will be whether or not to allow construction and operation of a ski area, and if so the specifics of such.

The analysis is being conducted by a third party consulting firm funded by the proponent and directed by the Forest Service. Work on the project was suspended by the proponent in late 1994, but it is expected to resume during the summer of 1998.

Public Health

Rodent Borne Diseases

Overview

Unnaturally high densities of rodents often develop as a result of habitat modifications produced when campgrounds and buildings are established in forested sites. When rodent population densities are high, the stage may be set for plague, hanta virus, or other rodent carried diseases in these areas.

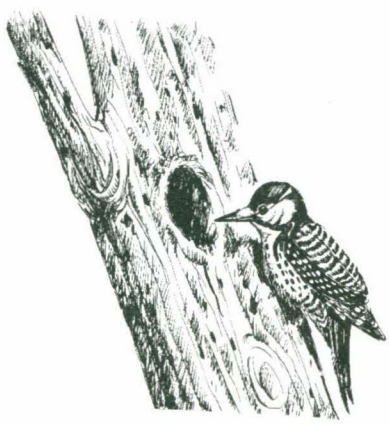
Plague is a highly infectious bacterial disease, primarily found in wild rodents. Plague becomes a public health threat when people enter wildland areas where the disease can be transferred from wild rodents to people or their pets.

Hanta virus, another rodent borne disease was identified in 1993. Its principal carrier is the deer mouse, a rodent found throughout the West. The greatest risk of contracting this virus is in enclosed buildings such as work sites, utility shacks, and small cabin type structures.

Present Status

A program that reduces the rodent population, nesting sites, and building access was started in 1994 and will continue in 1998 as part of an on-going effort to minimize exposure of the hanta virus. Managing human contact with rodent borne diseases involves a program of sanitation, the removal of rodent urine and feces from the interiors of buildings, buildings being disinfected, eradication, habitat modification, and rodent proofing of buildings. Hanta virus is destroyed by the ultraviolet rays in sunlight, so the general public using the forest outdoors is not perceived to be at any significant risk.

Plague carrying rodents occur on the Inyo National Forest only in the Sierra Nevada below 9000 feet in elevation. Use of insecticides to control fleas on rodents has proven to be effective in controlling plague in campgrounds and administrative sites where populations of rodents are attracted by abundant food and water sources. The forest is continuing to modify habitat by rodent proofing buildings and reducing sources of food and water.



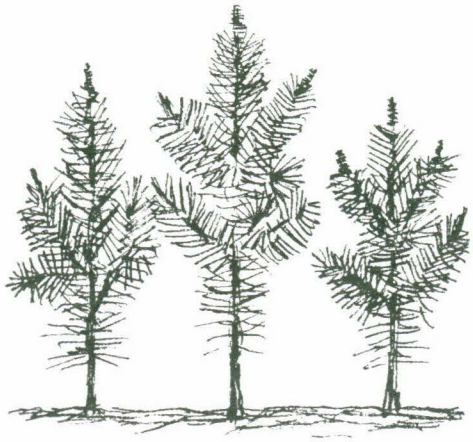
Horseshoe Lake and Mammoth Mountain Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Overview

Since 1990, carbon dioxide gas (CO_2) has been venting through the soil in four locations in the vicinity of Mammoth Mountain. The largest of these areas is adjacent to Horseshoe Lake, a recreation site containing a picnic area, swimming beach, trailhead, and group campground. The most noticeable effect of these emissions has been tree mortality. Approximately 54 acres of trees have died with 35 of those acres at Horseshoe Lake. The source of these emissions is deep underground and related to long term magmatic degassing. Although it is widely reported in the media that these emissions are the sign of a pending eruption, U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) scientists believe that the CO_2 is being released from a large gas reservoir that has existed for much longer than the current period of unrest in the Mammoth region. This fact, combined with the lack of seismic activity directly beneath Mammoth Mountain indicating magmatic movement, shows the prediction of an imminent eruption is not one based on scientific findings.

Present Status

The emissions are resulting in a new and increased workload for the Inyo National Forest. First, and most importantly, the Forest Service must assess the areas for any public health and safety concern. This involves frequent sampling of gasses in the recreation area and its facilities. In 1996 the USGS established a continuous monitoring system for CO_2 in the restrooms on site. Second, the Forest Service must dispose of the hazard trees, those trees which might cause injury or property damage if they fall. Third, a tremendous media interest has resulted from this event, which is the only place in the world where this is occurring. Fourth, the U.S. Geological Survey and the Forest Service are preparing displays and handouts to explain this unusual event to visitors. Lastly, the Forest Service is working with the scientific community, which is highly interested in researching this phenomenon.



Bear Problems

Overview and Present Status

Bears are now found in most areas of the Inyo National Forest. Due to the increasing availability of human food on both sides of the Sierra crest, bears have become dependent on unnatural food sources to survive. This has to do with the proximity of towns in the Sierra to bear habitat, as well as the fact that visitors need to be educated and encouraged to take the extra effort necessary to safeguard their food while visiting campgrounds or the backcountry. Most backcountry incidents could have been prevented with the use of bear canisters.

The Forest has responded in the following ways:

- Bear incidents involving property damage or threatening behavior are being documented and data is being collected to track the situation.
- The Forest has a Special Order for backcountry food storage which makes it a violation to improperly store food in the backcountry.
- Use of bear-resistant food storage canisters is being recommended for the backcountry and a flyer about food storage needs and new regulations is being attached to backcountry permits. Bear-resistant food canisters are required if camping from Onion Valley to Kearsarge Pass. Canisters are available for rent at some trailheads, Ranger Stations, and Visitor Centers.
- The Forest Supervisor has signed an order that makes it illegal to allow wild animals access to human food and garbage in developed recreation sites.
- Increased signing and site specific proactive education efforts will continue this year. Campers leaving food out of storage lockers will continue to be cited.
- The Forest has completed the construction of bear proof dumpsters and should have them in place when the camp grounds open this summer. The Forest is now looking forward to shifting efforts to installing bear proof food lockers in campground sites. The Forest is looking for ways to maximize the number of lockers installed for the amount of money available. This involves modification of existing designs to reduce material costs and to facilitate construction by inmates at the Owens Valley Conservation Camp. This technique was used successfully in the construction of bear proof dumpsters and resulted in cutting the cost by 50-70% and accelerating the completion of the program by several years.
- The Forest is participating with an interagency committee which is addressing the bear problem in and around the town of Mammoth Lakes. A coordinated strategy for dealing with bears and humans has been developed and implemented.

Mammoth Lakes Development

Overview

Mammoth Mountain Ski Area (MMSA) has always played a major role in the Eastern Sierra economy and recreation opportunities, operating under special use permit as a major partner with the Inyo National Forest. In the past few years, it has been faced with the challenge of how to reorganize and redevelop its resources to keep pace with ski resorts of national and international repute. Many of these resorts have changed ownership, with four major corporations emerging in North America as owners of a large number of ski areas.

Family-owned MMSA was approached by several of these corporations during the period when MMSA owners were acknowledging the need to upgrade and replace many of its facilities. The resort owners were reluctant to relinquish control of the ski area, even though they realized that new cash as well as some new partners might prove a great benefit in helping it regain its share of the ski market.

Present Status

As a result of negotiations with Intrawest, a renowned Canadian resort development corporation, MMSA retained control of the ski area while giving over development of its private real estate holdings to Intrawest. These negotiations resulted in a partnership wherein Intrawest will develop hotel, condominium, and other resort facilities on private land, such as the Lodestar Golf Course, Juniper Springs complex, and North Village Resort complex. MMSA will develop the ski area and related base facilities on National Forest land to complement the Intrawest developments.

Each entity has an interest in the other's business, retaining some ownership and voting power by having members serve on each other's Board of Directors. Although Intrawest holds a majority of shares of MMSA stock, the control of voting shares has been retained by the McCoy family and other long-standing MMSA owners. The result is a cash infusion which will allow MMSA to update its long-term development plan as it simultaneously invests $80 million in the next four-year period (starting in the summer of 1998) to modernize its uphill transportation, base lodge facilities, and associated slope improvements.

On National Forest land near Chairs 15 and 24, the Juniper Ridge (Base 7) base facility development has been approved and construction is expected to begin in the summer of 1999. The base area will consist of several buildings adjacent to the Intrawest Juniper Springs hotel/condominium development, and will offer complementary facilities such as restaurants, ski rental and other shops; with snow-making capability installed for the slopes in that area.

The replacement of the existing gondola with a high-capacity gondola will occur in 1998 and 1999, and several fixed-grip chairlifts will be replaced with high-speed detachable chairlifts in 1998. The children's ski school area will be relocated, served by its own surface lift.

MMSA is also finalizing the update of its approved development plan for Mammoth Mountain, involving both winter and summer operations; this update is expected to be submitted in 1999. June Mountain development is expected to remain stable, with the replacement or reconstruction of the QMC gondola being the first major issue to be resolved.

Intrawest will begin sales of its first units in the Juniper Springs complex in the spring of 1998, with a two-year construction schedule expected to start soon thereafter. Its other real estate holdings (North Village, the Rodeo Grounds in June Lake) will reflect a somewhat longer timetable, but will be synchronized with the MMSA planned development.

The Inyo National Forest will assist and respond to community planning needs and development plans associated with National Forest System lands as priorities and budget appropriations allow.

Mt. Whitney

Overview

The Mt. Whitney area continues to be the most popular wilderness destination on the Inyo National Forest and Sequoia National Park. This area includes the Mt. Whitney Trail, North Fork Lone Pine Creek (the Mountaineer's Route) and the Whitney Portal Recreation Area. Excessive visitation and managing human waste are the two biggest challenges within this area.

The strategy for attaining desired conditions is to manage Mt. Whitney and its access trails as a special zone with visitation held at current levels. Beginning in 1996, special permits were required for this zone for all visitors, including backpackers and dayhikers on the Mt. Whitney trail and hikers accessing the area from other trails.

The Inyo National Forest will continue the voluntary "Pack-It-Out" program where visitors are asked to take personal responsibility for packing out their own solid human waste. During 1996 and 1997 the Forest Service supplied "pack-it-out kits" to encourage hikers and climbers to remove their own waste. Results have been promising and wilderness managers continue to encourage this kind of personal responsibility on the part of visitors.

Present Status

The Park Service and Forest Service continue to work collaboratively to monitor and address the issues of use and impacts. Day and overnight use permits remain in place and have effectively curbed the excessive visitation and human waste problems. Human waste management within the Whitney Zone will always be a very difficult and expensive issue to mitigate. The toilets at Trail Camp, Outpost and the summit were retrofitted during the 1997 season. The current system accommodates the quantities of waste with a minimum of handling by rangers and reduced helicopter trips. Toilets still require diligent maintenance and management oversight. Work will be done on the North Fork drainage to identify and mitigate resource concerns with interested parties of local volunteers and permittees.

Geothermal Leasing and Development

Overview

In 1970 Congress passed the Geothermal Steam Act which classified geothermal resources as a leasable mineral. In 1972, the United States Geological Survey established the Mono-Long Valley Known Geothermal Resource Area (KGRA). This was an area of approximately 400,000 acres whose boundaries extended from just north of Mono Lake on the north to Crowley Lake on the south. The KGRA included many young volcanic features and its designation acknowledged the likelihood that geothermal resources would be present in developed quantities. Much of the northern end of the KGRA was subsequently withdrawn from geothermal leasing in 1984 by legislation which created the Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area.

Geothermal resources within the KGRA are leased on a competitive basis by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) which acts as the agent for the Federal Government. The Forest Service consents to leasing when the proposed lease area is on National Forest System land. Geothermal leases on the Inyo National Forest were sold by the Federal Government in 1980 and in 1984. Approximately 27,600 acres are currently under lease. Geothermal exploration activities in the KGRA reached a peak during the early 1980s. The first geothermal power plant was constructed in 1984 on private land near the Town of Mammoth Lakes. Two additional power plants were constructed near the original plant in 1990. One of the two new plants became the first geothermal power plant constructed on National Forest System land.

Present Status

In 1993 the geothermal industry expressed interest in leasing geothermal resources around the Mono Craters, south of the Scenic Area and east of U.S. Highway 395. The Forest began an analysis of a leasing proposal in September of 1993, but later discontinued the analysis due to a lack of Forest funding. Little interest has been expressed in restarting the leasing analysis.

In 1995 the Forest and the BLM

began working with Mono County to complete a joint Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (EIS/EIR) to document the potential impacts from the construction and operation of a fourth power plant at Casa Diablo. A third party environmental consultant is to be chosen jointly by the Forest Service, Mono County, and Bureau of Land Management to complete the environmental analysis. The EIS/EIR process was put on hold early in 1997 by the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) while they completed their review and approval of a revised power sales agreement between Mammoth Pacific Limited Partnership (operator of the geothermal power plants at that time) and Southern California Edison Corporation. The geothermal plants were subsequently acquired by Ogden Corporation who intend to restart the EIS/EIR process once the PUC has completed their review. The selection of the consultant and start of the analysis will occur shortly after the review by the PUC is completed. It is unsure when the analysis will resume. Completion of the analysis will take one to two years once the EIS/EIR process is restarted.

Mammoth Lakes Water Development

Overview

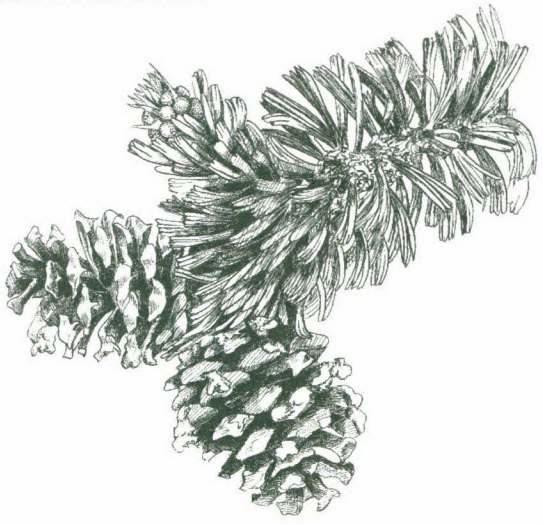
The issue of development in and around the Town of Mammoth Lakes (TML) continues to be important to the Inyo National Forest. The Forest emphasizes working together with local communities in an effort to meet common goals and work on issues of interest to all.

The Town currently has reached approximately two-thirds of its identified buildout as specified in its General Plan. Four major development projects are in various stages of completion. The Lodestar, North Village, Snowcreek, and Juniper Ridge developments will each have some effect on water resources for the town.

The Mammoth Community Water District's (MCWD) oldest source of water is surface diversion from the Lakes Basin from a water right issued through the State. MCWD has also drilled a series of groundwater wells within the private land base of the community. The town has a need for approximately 5000 acre feet of water at buildout and MCWD estimates their ability currently is to provide approximately 3400 acre feet during drought periods and 4000 acre feet during normal years. Several of the wells included in this estimate have only been in use for a few years and their capabilities have yet to be proven.

The Forest is finalizing an environmental document for the withdrawal of reclaimed water from Laurel Pond and utilization of treated water for turf intensive projects, such as the Snowcreek Golf Course. There are several users of outside irrigation that could utilize this resource, thus freeing up additional groundwater for domestic uses. A side benefit of this proposal would be the upgrading of the treatment plant to a tertiary capability.

MCWD anticipates requesting the ability to withdraw additional groundwater from National Forest System lands adjacent to the Town of Mammoth Lakes in the Dry Creek drainage. An analysis was started several years ago, but was terminated when MCWD decided to drill the additional wells on private land. The issues associated with the Dry Creek proposal will be cumulative impacts and other effects to water users within the watershed. MCWD feels they will have a need to have this system on-line by approximately 2005.



Coalition for Unified Recreation in the Eastern Sierra and the Rural Community Assistance Program

Overview

The Inyo National Forest is one of the most heavily used recreation forests in the National Forest system. In the Eastern Sierra region, recreation occurs on National Forest lands, Public Domain administered by the Bureau of Land Management, National Parks (Yosemite and Death Valley), California State Parks, City of Los Angeles lands, Inyo and Mono County lands, and private lands. Many individuals, organizations, and agencies are responsible for serving visitors to the area and for managing the recreation resources. The Coalition for Unified Recreation in the Eastern Sierra (CURES) was established to help bring together the many recreation providers, in an effort to "preserve the natural, cultural, and economic resources and enrich the experiences of visitors and residents." The basic premise of CURES is, "A collaborative effort of recreation providers working together is considerably more responsible and effective than individual efforts, or recreation providers working independently."

Present Status

More than 50 individuals, representing the diverse recreation providers of the Eastern Sierra, are currently working together in the coalition in an attempt to achieve common goals. Task groups focus on marketing, interpretation and information, resource protection and economic balancing, the Highway 395 Scenic Byway, and many other recreation projects.

In the last few years CURES has accomplished a lot of work. A multi-lingual Eastern Sierra recreation opportunities brochure was published; three good-host training seminars were sponsored in Mammoth and Bishop with over 200 people attending; an annual interpretive activities guide is produced for use at visitor centers and ranger stations; a tourism marketing conversion study has been completed; a public workshop for the Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project was hosted; visitor information interactive kiosks have been placed in three heavily visited visitor centers; and the time is getting close to award a construction contract for the Highway 395 Scenic Byway. In 1996 CURES was the recipient of the California Tourism Commission's Good Host Award.

Many benefits of CURES are evident in the improved relations between private recreation providers, agency officials, community leaders, chambers of commerce, and representatives of special interest organizations. CURES has received several grants to accomplish work that would otherwise not be accomplished. This is in no small part due to the partnerships that have been forged. The Forest Service and BLM will continue to make CURES a top priority, as it provides an excellent avenue for the agencies to constructively work for common purpose and commitment in the area of recreation management with all interested and affected groups and individuals.

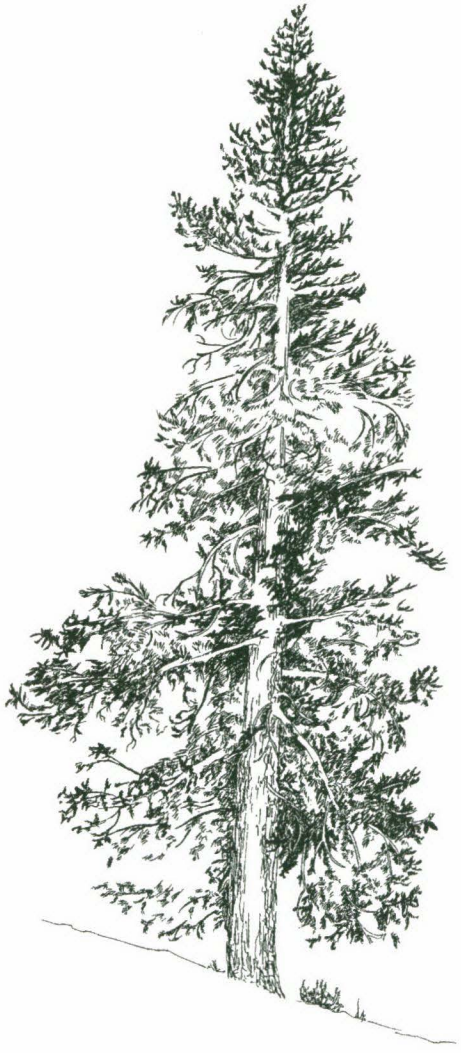
Even while budgets are being reduced, the Inyo National Forest is continuing to increase its role in Rural Community Development. The 1990 Farm Bill provided the Forest Service with the authority and responsibility to assist communities dependent on national forest resources. There are many programs available through the Forest Service to assist communities in developing vital economies.

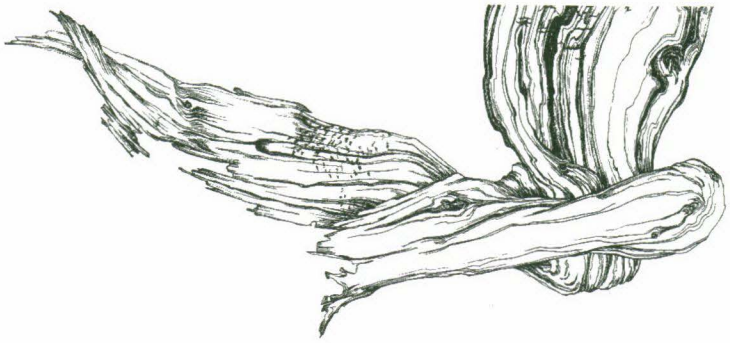
Both Inyo and Mono Counties meet the definition of rural communities under the Farm Bill. The Forest and local communities developed a Community Action Plan and have submitted several project funding proposals through the CURES organization. CURES has been successful in obtaining three Rural Economic Recovery Grants. In 1993, they received $25,000 to publish a multi-lingual Eastern Sierra Recreation Opportunities brochure. In 1994, they received $24,000 to sponsor Good Host Training for the private sector, distribute the Recreation Opportunities brochure and accomplish some marketing research. In 1995, they received $24,000 to provide visitor information computer kiosks at three heavily used visitor centers.

Grants have also been awarded for the purpose of achieving various forms of community based planning. In 1996 Mono County was successful in obtaining a $25,000 Economic Recovery Grant to help in the initial implementation and start-up of the Mono County Collaborative Planning Team. In 1997 the Mono County Arts

Council received $12,700 to conduct a Cultural and Heritage Tourism assessment and Implementation Plan for Mono County, and the Inyo Mono Advocates for Community Action received $8,800 to do community action planning in the communities of Lone Pine, Independence and Big Pine.

The Inyo National Forest and the Bureau of Land Management remain committed to working through CURES and other avenues to further the sustainability of local rural communities.





Collaborative Planning and Local Government Relations

During the last year, the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) continued to work with Mono County and a variety of other federal, state and local partners in developing the Mono County Collaborative Planning Team. This concept was established by a resolution of the Mono County Board of Supervisors in 1995, with the intention of providing enhanced levels of service to the public through an integrated approach to planning. If this approach is successful, it has the potential of establishing a model that can be used as a catalyst in strengthening intergovernmental relations and providing more responsive service to the public. The memorandum of understanding was approved by the County Supervisors and other signators in December of 1996.

The Mono County Collaborative Planning Team has selected wetlands as its highest priority issue for 1997-98. A formal technical team has been established to address wetland issues and opportunities. Urban interface issues surfaced as the Mono County Collaborative Planning Team's second highest priority. The Team is using information and guiding principles from the Sierra Business Council to build on and apply specifically to Mono County.

The Bishop, Tonopah and Ridgecrest BLM offices met with the Big Pine Tribe during 1997 for the first annual protocol consultation meeting to discuss numerous issues of mutual interest. The BLM has also sent offers for protocol development to all other tribes who have an interest in the field office and its management. The Bishop BLM office and the Bishop Tribe are near completion of their protocol.

The California Indian Land Act has not yet passed through Congress, but it continues to have the support of the BLM, the local tribes, and the local governmental entities. The tribes are working to get Congressional support for the passage of this important Act. The California Indian Land Act would provide 200 acres for Fort Independence, 240 acres for Benton and 40 acres for Bridgeport tribes. All these parcels were identified in the Bishop Resource Management Plan and had the support of the County Boards of Supervisors.

One of the more productive efforts during 1997 was the continued

co-location of the Forest Service Visitor Center and the Town of Mammoth Lakes Visitor Bureau in the existing Forest Service facility at Mammoth Lakes. This has resulted in increased efficiency for both operations as well as decreased costs.

Work on the Mammoth to June analysis is continuing, and after review and incorporation of public comments, the final Desired Condition was released in January of 1997. In May, a public meeting was held to solicit project ideas that would assist in moving towards the desired future condition. The Forest has identified those projects that will be implemented in 1998. (See section on Mammoth/June Ecosystem Management.)

The Forest and BLM have continued to participate as members of the Coalition for Unified Recreation in the Eastern Sierra, Inyo Associates, and the Owens Valley Interagency Land and Wildlife Committee. In addition, the Forest has worked with various entities including Mono County in obtaining Rural Development grants, and are deeply involved in the Highway 395 Scenic Byway project with other members of CURES.

The Inyo National Forest will participate in the development of the Sierra Nevada Conservation Framework concept that Regional Forester, Lynn Sprague is proposing in cooperation with other government agencies and the public for the Sierra Nevada. The efforts will provide an integrated, collaborative framework of concepts, principles, and goals for the region that could be used to help guide future land-use decisions.

Snowcreek Golf Course Expansion

Overview

Dempsey Construction Corporation submitted an application for a special use permit to expand the existing Snowcreek Golf Course on National Forest System lands adjacent to the Town of Mammoth Lakes in April of 1990. The permit application was evaluated and an Environmental Assessment (EA) completed on the proposal. The Forest Supervisor issued a decision approving the proposal on February 1, 1991. This decision was appealed. Upon review of the decision, it was determined that the Forest Supervisor had not been delegated the authority to make the decision, and the decision was withdrawn on November 3, 1992.

The special use application and environmental analysis were forwarded to the Chief of the Forest Service for a decision. The Chief denied the application in August of 1994, based on policy issues. Dempsey reapplied in December of 1994, providing additional information related to the policy issues raised by the Chief. The Chief accepted the revised application and approved in concept the proposal to expand the golf course on the National Forest. The Chief delegated authority for the analysis and decision to the Forest Supervisor.

The Forest Supervisor issued a Notice of Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the proposal in July of 1995. Key issues identified during scoping include potential impact on deer habitat, water quality, water quantity, visual resources, and recreation. Several alternatives were developed to address these issues. The Draft EIS was released for comment in December of 1995. Comments on the Draft indicated a need to address the issue of groundwater extraction for irrigation in greater detail. The Forest Service and the proponent have worked with other agencies, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and California Department of Fish and Game to address this issue.

Present Status

The Final EIS and Record of Decision were released on June 20, 1997. The decision approved expansion of the Snowcreek Golf Course on National Forest System lands under the authority of a Special Use Authorization. This decision was appealed by the Sierra Club, but on review, the decision to expand the golf course was upheld by the Deputy Regional Forester on September 26, 1997.

The Inyo National Forest is currently in the process of finalizing the Special Use Permit, and is working with the proponent on final design plans for the expansion. The permit will be issued in the spring of 1998, and construction will begin in the summer of 1998.

Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive Species

Overview

Management of Federally listed threatened and endangered species continues to play an integral role in management of the Inyo National Forest and the Bishop Resource Area of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

Five Federally listed species are known to occur within the Forest boundaries. These include the peregrine falcon (endangered), bald eagle (threatened), Owens tui chub (endangered), Lahontan cutthroat trout (threatened) and Paiute cutthroat trout (threatened). All but the Owens tui chub have plans approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) which provide management direction for species recovery. Management direction for the Owens tui chub is currently being developed as part of the Owens Valley Multi-Species Recovery Plan. This inter-agency effort is still in the draft documentation and analysis phase and should be completed in 1999.

Present Status

Population numbers for the five listed species appear to be following a static to slightly increasing trend. The bald eagle, for example, is increasing in numbers throughout its range and was downlisted from endangered to threatened in 1995. The ultimate goal for all of these species is to increase numbers and improve habitat so that Federal protection is no longer necessary.

The Forest budget for managing threatened, endangered and sensitive species increased by over 150% in 1998, recognizing the importance the Forest Service places on recovery of these. Primary focus for this year will be to update our knowledge base through concentrated inventory and monitoring efforts, to plan and implement habitat improvement projects, and to continue to work with our cooperators to finalize the Owens Valley Multi-Species Recovery Plan.

The Bishop BLM installed monitoring wells at Fish Slough in 1997. This was the last action called for in the Fish Slough Area of Critical Concern Environmental Concern and it will allow the participating agencies to more closely monitor water levels for critical endangered fish species habitat. The wells may also play an important role in determining the aquifer water sources for Fish Slough.

In 1998, BLM has committed to repairing a dam structure in Fish Slough. The dam's current state of disrepair may be a contributing factor for the presence of bass in the ponds set aside for the endangered fish species.

Sensitive Species Overview

The Forest Service defines "sensitive" species as those plant and animal species identified by a Regional Forester for which population viability is a concern, as evidenced by:

a. Significant current or predicted downward trends in population numbers or density.

b. Significant current or predicted downward trends in habitat capability that would reduce a species' existing distribution.

Management direction for sensitive species is to "develop and implement management practices to ensure that species do not become listed as threatened or endangered because of Forest Service actions."

The Inyo National Forest contains habitat for known populations of 40 sensitive species, including four birds, four mammals, two amphibians and 24 plants. There are an additional 34 plant species on the Inyo National Forest watch list. Of the 24 sensitive plants, 12 have interim or final Species Management Guides. These Guides discuss population distribution and potential threats; identify information needs; and propose specific management recommendations to insure continued population viability.

Sensitive Species Present Status

Two species of amphibians found on the Forest (mountain yellow-legged frog and Yosemite toad) were added to the sensitive species list on January 1, 1998. Amphibian populations throughout the Sierra Nevada have been declining at a dramatic rate over the past several decades, however the principle reasons for this are not completely understood. Possible causative factors include pollution, increased ultra-violet radiation and the presence of introduced trout in previously fish-less alpine lakes.

The Inyo continues to work with other agencies to complete a conservation strategy for Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep. Recent genetic information suggests that these sheep are much more unique than previously thought, possibly

meriting their own sub-species designation. Once wide-spread from Sonora Pass to the southern Sierra, these animals now number fewer than 150 individuals, roaming their range in small bands which are highly susceptible to random extinction. The conservation strategy will identify management opportunities intended to reverse the downward trend and hopefully keep this species from becoming listed as either threatened or endangered. Specific conservation actions were implemented in 1997, including a 650 acre prescribed burn in Lee Vining Canyon. Similar habitat improvement efforts are underway for this year with plans for additional prescribed fires in the southern portion of the sheep range. These burns are designed to remove hiding cover for mountain lions, the bighorn's principle predator.

The northern goshawk has received renewed attention as it has recently been proposed for listing under the Endangered Species Act. The USFWS is conducting a status review to determine whether Federal listing will be required to preserve this species. The Forest is cooperating in this effort by monitoring all known nesting territories and developing a database of habitat quality and impacts of management activities.

The state fish of California, the Volcano Creek Golden trout lives in its native range in two watersheds on the Kern Plateau at the southern end of the Forest. The Regional Forester is currently considering this species for designation as a Forest Service Sensitive Specie. Pure strains of this species exist on only 128 miles out of 220 miles of its historic range. Factors such as hybridization with non-native rainbow trout, high predation rates by non-native brown trout, and habitat degradation place the long-term future viability of the species in question. A draft Golden Trout Conservation Strategy designed to implement management actions to ensure the long-term viability of the species is being completed through an interagency effort with California Department of Fish and Game. The Strategy is currently in draft form and is undergoing internal agency review. The next step is to present the document to the USFWS for additional input. The trout may ultimately be petitioned for listing as a Federal Threatened or Endangered Species so it is important to obtain USFWS concurrence with proposed management actions. One of the goals of the Strategy is to begin an active species recovery program before the trout or its habitat reaches a crisis situation where Federal listing is imminent. The current timeframe is to have the document completed by the end of May, 1998 so that it can be utilized as part of the Kern Ecosystem Management public participation process.

The Forest continues to work with the USFWS towards the completion and implementation of a Conservation Agreement for *Abronia alpina,* a plant species restricted to Ramshaw and Templeton Meadows in the southern Sierra Nevada. In 1997, trails were rerouted, and natural barriers placed to deter travel by hikers, packstock, and livestock through vulnerable populations. In addition, the Forest continued to monitor livestock trailing in Ramshaw Meadows, and *abronia* population trends.

Long-term monitoring plots were re-read in 1997 for *Cryptantha roosiorum,* a state listed rare and Forest Service sensitive plant restricted to the crest of the Inyo Mountains. Information from this monitoring was utilized in allotment management planning.

Over 2000 acres were surveyed for sensitive and watch list plant species in 1997, with one new sensitive plant population and 12 watch list plant populations recorded.

Existing and Proposed Hydroelectric Projects

Relicensing of Existing Projects

Three of Southern California Edison's (SCE's) existing hydroelectric projects on the Forest recently received new licenses—Bishop Creek, Rush Creek and Lee Vining Creek. The Lundy/Mill Creek Project at the north end of the Forest remains under appeal pending resolution of sensitive resource issues in the Mono Basin. Instream flow releases, diversion of Wilson Creek water, and fishery habitat concerns are the primary issues still to be resolved. The Inyo is currently working with SCE, the California Department of Fish and Game, and several local publics to resolve stream flow issues, ownership and maintenance of diversion systems, fish screening and habitat protection measures, and water right adjudication for Mill Creek. A new 30-year license to operate the Lundy Hydroelectric Project may be issued to SCE by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) within the next two years.

As part of the relicensing conditions, the Inyo National Forest received funding from SCE in November, 1997 to enhance recreational opportunities within the Bishop Creek drainage. The Forest plans to construct new campground facilities and add more overnight sites to Four Jeffrey and Big Trees Campgrounds, located within the Bishop Creek Project. A series of hiking trails connecting recreational areas and campgrounds within the license boundaries may also be constructed with these funds. Other improvements may be made in the near future to enhance fisheries, aesthetics, wildlife and riparian resources on Bishop Creek.

Ongoing Hydroelectric Proposal

Construction has not yet begun for the proposed Tungstar Project in upper Pine Creek drainage near Rovana. The Forest completed their review of the Tungstar Project Plans in January, 1998, by providing comments to Special Use Permit conditions required to protect National Forest resources. The Forest Service and the project proponent are currently in litigation over use of the Federal Government's riparian water rights for this project, and simultaneously for a similar proposed project in the Red Mountain/Tinemaha Creeks area southwest of Big Pine. Both of these unconstructed hydropower projects would partially utilize National Forest System lands for their operation and long-term viability. It is still the position of the Forest that the proponent make a sufficient showing of a water right for hydropower production. A judicial determination on the adequacy of the water rights for these two projects is expected in the Spring of 1998.

Land Exchanges

Overview

The Forest continues to have an active landownership adjustment program. The program is designed to further consolidate landownership patterns throughout the Forest, to convey into non-Federal ownership National Forest System lands needed for orderly community growth and development, and to acquire non-Federal land having significant recreation, wildlife, wetland, riparian, wilderness, fisheries, and/or scenic resource values that would benefit from Forest Service protection and management.

Present Status

An exchange with the Mammoth Lakes Foundation to accommodate a proposed Community College facility on 86.7 acres is currently in progress, involving National Forest System lands adjacent to Mammoth Lakes. A college center building, constructed under special use permit, occupies a small portion of the proposed exchange site. Non-Federal lands having significant resource values in the Mono Basin, located at Old Marina and along Lee Vining Creek, will be acquired in the exchange, totaling approximately 526.5 acres. This exchange is scheduled to be completed by fall, 1998.

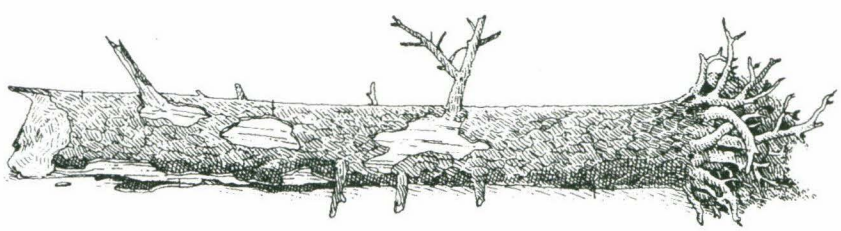
The Shady Rest Exchange, also in the Town of Mammoth Lakes, would exchange out a land-locked Forest Service parcel of 24.75 acres in the center of town. The proponent wishes to develop an affordable housing project and the land has been zoned for this type of use. In exchange, the Forest is looking at acquiring 55 acres in the Golden Trout Wilderness, 280 acres in the Coyote Flat area containing desirable riparian values, and at least one other parcel yet to be identified. This exchange should be completed in 1999.

A State of California Lands Commission Exchange, involving 12 National Forests and approximately 11,000 acres statewide, is once again active this year. Although the Plumas National Forest is leading the exchange, the Inyo National Forest will gain approximately 1,075 acres from four State-owned parcels in the Mono Basin as a receiving Forest. These parcels are located north and east of Mono Lake in the vicinity of Black Point, Warms Springs and the Sulphur Ponds near Highway 167. In exchange, the State Lands Commission would receive approximately 2,200 acres of timber land in Plumas County. It is anticipated this exchange will be completed in 1999.

Two wilderness parcels are scheduled to be acquired by the Inyo National Forest from the Wilderness Land Trust in 1998. Both parcels are located in the Golden Trout Wilderness on the south end of the forest and are entirely surrounded by National Forest System lands. The Burhardt Parcel is a 40 acre inholding located near Horseshoe Meadows. Another 40 acre parcel, known as the Hell-For-Sure Creek property, is located east of the Kern River near Grasshopper Flat. Both parcels have outstanding attributes for wilderness acquisition. The Wilderness Land Trust purchases parcels nationwide from private landowners for inclusion into designated wilderness areas.

The Bishop Bureau of Land Management completed a complex land exchange with Los Angeles Department of Water and Power and the National Park Service to provide a land base for Manzanar National Park. An additional benefit from this exchange was the release of selected BLM parcels in Inyo and Mono Counties from a Congressional Watershed Withdrawal which will allow these parcels to be used in future land exchanges. DWP also signed a Letter of Intent assuring the future transfer of some additional lands to Inyo County or private ownership in order to offset the tax base lost at Manzanar.

The Bureau of Land Management is currently working towards completion of the Benton Land Exchange. The first phase of this exchange will balance out a tax base loss in Mono County for BLM's acquisition of Dynamo Pond on Green Creek near Bridgeport.



Mammoth / June Ecosystem Management

Overview

The Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) approved in August 1988 specified that the Inyo National Forest conduct a cumulative effects study of the Mammoth/June area whenever a development proposal in this area requires an Environmental Impact Statement. The 35,000 acre Mammoth/June area is bounded by U.S. 395 on the east; Highway 203 on the south; the John Muir and Ansel Adams Wildernesses on the west; and the ridgeline of the June Lake complex on the north (p. 187 FLRMP). Although no development proposal was pending, a long standing public interest in the area resulted in the Inyo National Forest instituting a planning process to create an integrated desired condition based upon ecosystem management principles for the Mammoth-June area. The process included the collection of base-line resource data, identification of a desired condition for the study area, identification of areas that do not meet the desired condition, and proposed actions to achieve the desired condition.

In 1991, collection of base-line data began for many resources including water, timber, soils, recreation, cultural, vegetation, geology, minerals, air, wildlife, fisheries, lands, transportation, and range. A report, "Existing and Historic Conditions of the Mammoth to June Area" was released in July of 1995, containing the results of these studies.

The next phase of the assessment, development of the Desired Condition, began in the summer of 1995 and included the public and the analysis team. Based on public comments, the Forest Plan, and resource data, the analysis team drafted a Desired Condition for the area, which was released for comment in November of 1995. After review and incorporation of public comments, the final Desired Condition was released in January of 1997, ending this portion of the process.

In May, 1997, a public meeting was held to solicit project ideas for implementation. In the assessment, "opportunities" (projects) were identified, based upon discrepancies between the existing conditions on the ground and those described in the plan. These opportunities will be scheduled into the Inyo National Forest program of work as time, funding, and other scheduling constraints allow. Public "working groups" involving several of the projects are open to anyone who is interested in participating.

A partial list of projects planned for implementation in 1998 is as follows:

- Identify opportunities for fire hazard reduction in the "Scenic Loop South" area (east of the Town, south of the Scenic Loop, and north of Hwy 203).
- Review/survey road and trail opportunities (both winter and summer) in the "Scenic Loop South" area, to be done in conjunction with the OHV and Mountain Bike working groups. Schedule NEPA analysis where trail construction, closures, or reroutes are identified.
- Implement a previously-approved thinning project (Angel, Ballpark, Boundary, Dodger, Mariette, & Shady Rest Precommercial thinning); which involves thinning of small-diameter trees located in the "Scenic Loop South" portion of the M/J assessment area.
- Evaluate/identify potential developed snow play sites along the Scenic Loop road.
- Monitor populations of Yosemite toads in Glass Creek Meadow.
- Implement the 1998 revised fuelwood strategy.

Many projects will involve forest health/ecosystem management projects in such areas as vegetation management, soils and watershed restoration projects, reintroduction of prescribed fire, fuels reduction, and better-managed recreation opportunities. Some of the projects require additional planning and data collection, while other projects require only volunteers to help with implementation. Large projects requiring detailed environmental analysis are noted in the Inyo National Forest quarterly NEPA Schedule of Proposed Actions. Smaller projects, although still analyzed through the NEPA process can be implemented without the larger, detailed analysis and are not listed in the quarterly report. Information on proposed smaller projects can be found on the Inyo National Forest Website and in the media. Some ongoing activities do not require analysis under NEPA, such as designation, signing, and mapping of OHV routes and mountain bike routes where the roads or trails already exist (per the 1992 inventory), monitoring of water quality and quantity of creeks and springs, wildlife monitoring projects, increased law enforcement and education, and other similar projects.

Off-Highway Vehicle Use Strategy

Overview

Presidential Executive Order No. 11644 of February 9, 1972, required establishment of policies and procedures that would ensure use of off-highway vehicles on public lands, promote the safety of all users of those lands, and minimize conflicting uses on those lands.

The Inyo National Forest policy for management of off-highway vehicles (OHV) was contained in the Interagency Motor Vehicle Use Plan approved in 1977 by the Inyo National Forest, Bureau of Land Management, and the City of Los Angeles, and as modified by various Forest Orders; statutory restrictions for wilderness designated by Congress subsequent to the 1977 Plan; by direction in the Forest Land and Resource Management Plan as well as the Bishop Resource Area Management Plan; and by direction in the Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area comprehensive Management Plan.

The Inyo National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan directs the Forest to manage OHV use under the existing 1977 plan until that plan is updated. A Draft Interagency Motor Vehicle Use Plan was released to the public in September of 1993, along with a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that addressed those portions of the plan that are subject to review under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Many comments on the Draft EIS concerned actions proposed for specific routes, as well as the adequacy of information used to analyze certain issues. Of particular concern was the lack of site specific analysis to support specific actions on over 1200 routes.

Present Status

The 1977 Motor Vehicle Use Plan was updated and released in December of 1996 as the Interagency Vehicle Access Strategy. In 1997 this strategy was implemented jointly with BLM. Actions focused on Vehicle Access Designations, Visitor Services, Vehicle Route Access, and Resource Monitoring and Management. Three resource zones were established with public meetings and field trips held to discuss issues and projects. Working groups from the three zones brought forward site specific concerns for agency analysis and decisions.

Approaching the route designation issue on a site specific basis has focused the energies of both the agencies and the public working groups. Route designations are evaluated on a yearly basis, supported by site specific monitoring and analysis. The BLM and the Forest Service will continue to work together through the implementation of the strategy.

OHV grants helped to build the Deepest Valley Interagency Cooperative Plant Propagation Center. This Center has already provided native plant materials to be used in road rehabilitation as well as other reclamation projects.

Royal Gold Heap Leach Mine Proposal

Overview

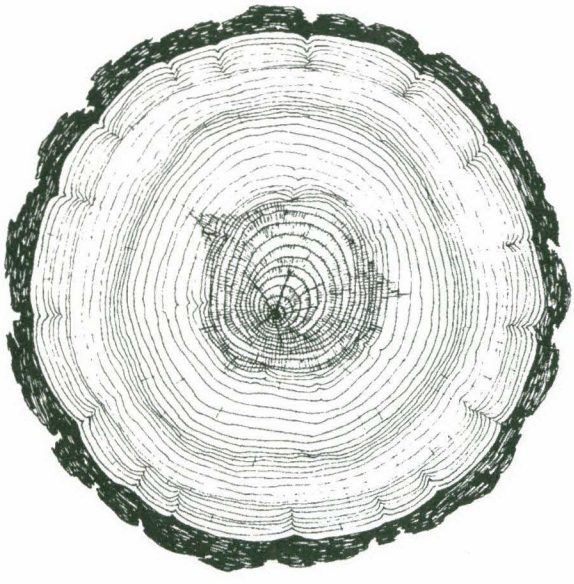
In 1989 Royal Gold, Inc. of Denver, Colorado submitted an operating plan to establish an open pit mining operation approximately six miles east of the Town of Mammoth Lakes in the Long Valley area of the Inyo National Forest. The project proposal included the development of a mine, a heap leach pad, and a waste rock disposal area. The total area involved in the proposal was approximately 80 acres. Since 1989, Royal Gold has completed eight phases of exploratory drilling. The open pit mine proposal was subsequently withdrawn as additional exploration work was completed. Each exploration phase was approved by the Forest Service through Decision Memos categorically excluding (CE) the exploration work from more detailed NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) analysis. The projects were Categorically Excluded due to the fact that each proposal met the criteria of a short-term (one year or less) mineral investigation.

Present Status

In April, 1998, Royal Gold submitted a proposal to the Inyo National Forest for the ninth phase of exploratory drilling. The proposed exploratory sites are located in the same general area as the previous exploration drilling; between approximately one mile north of the Hot Creek Fish Hatchery and the "clay pit," and between one and two miles west of the Hot Creek Geologic Interpretive Site.

The proposed work is similar to that completed during the last eight phases of exploration. This ninth phase would add as many as 100 exploration holes, drilled to a depth of up to 300 feet. The exploration work is designed to further define the limits of mineralization identified during previous exploration activities and to explore areas which might be used to locate processing facilities if a mine operation is proposed in the future.

Most of the drilling is proposed in areas which have previously been surveyed for other resource values, such as historic, wildlife, and botanical. Due to the large degree of public interest generated by the discussion of a possible large open pit mine being developed in the area, an Environmental Assessment will be completed for this year's proposal.



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